

Land and Agrarian Policy and Practice in South Africa: Beyond the Impasse

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There is an impasse in thinking about land and agrarian issues in South Africa. It is an impasse rooted in the ongoing rhetoric of reform and the overarching reality of failure. There is clearly an urgent necessity to move beyond it by thinking afresh about these vital issues from the perspective of citizenship in South Africa and for the sustainability of democracy. Using the classical text of Tiberius' land proposal in ancient Rome as a backdrop, the paper highlights the ongoing failures of land reform in South Africa.

In his state of the nation address in June 2009, newly elected President Jacob Zuma promised to develop and implement a Comprehensive Rural Development Strategy designed to link land and agrarian reform with food security in an effort to deal more decisively with the legacies of apartheid. Zuma's ambitious rhetoric lies in sharp contrast with the statement by Gugile Nkwinti, the Minister of the newly formed Department of Rural Development and Land Tenure that 90% of the restituted or redistributed farms have collapsed as going concerns and are no longer productive. There is clearly a huge gap between the policy rhetoric on the one hand and the multifarious problems of practice and implementation

(especially in relation to the budgetary allocations for programmes, for example) on the other. But that is not the only the issue of concern. There are also fundamental contradictions in the policies themselves because of an anomalous reliance on both neo-liberal as well as development state initiatives. The much anticipated Green Paper on Land Reform has yet to see the light of day and the longer the delays are with us, the more urgent the abiding problem of racialised inequality in access to and ownership of land becomes. This paper seeks a way out of the impasse, by demonstrating that the problems we face are not unique to South Africa, but that the manner in which we have chosen to deal with these problems is wholly ineffectual.

As a case in point, the paper uses the experiences of the restitution of land in Salem in the Eastern Cape.